

## Bliss in Blemish: Acceptance of Self in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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### ABSTRACT

*Indra Sinha's Animal's People is a tale of pain and suffering uttered through the mouth of a nineteen-year-old boy Animal. The novel vividly portrays the repercussions of Bhopal disaster that demolished the lives of many innocent people. Even after years people combat with the physical and mental trauma of the calamity. Animal is one such victim who is pushed to poverty and deformity because of poisonous gas. He even loses his identity as a human being and is forced to live in streets. Because of his disability, he feels inferior and restricts himself to live within a small circle. Though he desires to look beyond the horizon, his crippled self, serves as a chain that confines his wings. This paper attempts to show how an individual can live a happy life by accepting one's self with all frills and flaws.*

**Keywords:** Disability, Identity, Trauma, Realisation

Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's people* brings to light the aftereffects of Bhopal gas tragedy that left incurable scars in the lives of many people. The toxic gas percolated from the factory wiped away happiness from the life of many. The protagonist Animal serves as a voice to the muted community of Khaufpur, a place ruined by the poisonous gas released from the chemical company. Animal is the representation of an entire community who are left traumatized and denied justice. He was born normal but he does not remember himself as a normal human being. He was told by the people that he used to walk on two feet. He says "I used to be human once, so I'm told, I don't remember it myself..." (1). Every child born in this world desires and deserves the love and care of family and the identity of a child is derived from the parents. Animal has no name or religion because he is an orphan who lost his family in the disaster. He got the name 'Animal' because of his twisted spine. When Animal turned six, he loses his walking ability because of the effects of chemical gas. Even his friends started teasing him for his disability. They address the dog Jara as his girlfriend. When they see dogs mating in streets, his friends mock Animal. They say "Hey Animal, is this how you do it" (16)? Exposed to the darker side of the society right from the childhood, he detaches himself physically and emotionally from the society. To sooth his hidden wounds he even visits a brothel house and develops a bond with a girl named Anjali.

All the hatred and humiliation received from his fellow beings creates a deep scar inside the heart of Animal and he hesitates even to trust the people with good intentions. When a

foreign doctor Elli Barber, sets up a free clinic to treat the victims of the disaster, he hesitates to trust her. He firmly believes that no one can understand his pangs because he is the one who lived through the sea of struggles. When a journalist approaches him to record his story he is unwilling because he thinks that the story of person like him has no power to sow seeds for a better change. Society shows a disgusted face towards him which adds to the bitterness that rules his heart. There is no one to listen to the stories that are entombed in his mind. He says “People see the outside, but it’s inside where the real things happen, no one looks in there, maybe they don’t dare” (11). He is victimised both by the society and by the company. He feels bad for everything that turned his life upside down but somehow manages to survive amidst all the ill treatments,

Animal wishes to show a good face to the society but sometimes unpleasant situations force him to act savagely. He is a good human by heart but to protect himself from the annoying attitude of the society, he wears a mask of insouciance. He hates the people who show pity towards him and fights with people who criticise him. Deep down he longs to walk like normal people but has no dare to say it loud. Animal lives in an abandoned factory where cobras reside and considers it as his kingdom. He feels comfortable inside that locked up building because there is no one to intrude his inner peace. His physical disability creates a mental disability which results in a deep sense of insecurity and inferiority. He is very careful in voicing his feelings because he wants no one to sympathise him. When Nisha, a daughter of a local musician treats him with respect, Animal let her inside his small circle. He likes her for accepting him as he is, because in his life, as far as he could remember, people looked down on him because of his deformity. He loves Nisha but never opens up his feelings because he thinks that Zafar, Nisha’s fiancé is a better suit for Nisha. Because of his misshape, he feels insufficient and says “my back was bent as a scorpion’s tail” (47). Zafar is also a sensible character who thinks that Animal deserves, dignity, love and respect like his fellow humans. He invites Animal to work with him and asks Animal to keep his ears and eyes open to notice the unusual happenings in Khaufpur. Zafar advises Animal not to allow people to address him after his disability and asks him to choose a name for himself. Animal refuses the offer because he has created a boundary inside his heart, forcefully accepting his non-human identity. He says “‘My name is Animal’, I say. I’m not a fucking human being, I’ve no wish to be one.” (23).

People of Khaufpur respect him when he starts working with Zafar. But Animal wishes to be respected as an individual. After seeing the selfless services of Elli Barber, Animal trusts her and asks her whether she can do something to make him walk on four feet. When Elli sends

his x-ray to America, Animal finds a strange hope growing within him and starts saving money for his operation. He even believes that Nisha will fall in love with him when he walks like a human being. Though he wishes to stroll forward, towards a better future, the struggles of the people around him coerce him to think other way. Orphaned from the childhood, Animal secretly yearns to have a family of his own. He desires to get married and live a life of a man but thinks that no one will marry him. When Nisha states that he is a beautiful man by heart, he replies “I’m not a man” (47). Pushed to the margin by the society and the company, there is no hope inside the heart of Animal. He considers this nothingness as his big strength and says “Hope is a crutch for weaklings. The strong carry on without” (75). He has no steam left to fight for his rights and respect because he always feels exhausted after gaping at the unfair side of the society. Rather than fighting for his human identity, he looks for the benefits that he can enjoy as an animalized human being. In an argument with Farouq, he claims “I’m an animal, I don’t have to do like the rest of you, laws of society don’t apply to me because I’m a fucking animal” (87). Farouq opines that to shun from the commitments of a human being, Animal considers himself to be an animal and Animal denies that instantly. He thinks that if he admits himself as a human being, he will have to agree that he is wrong shaped. Armed with unity the people of Khaufpur manages to overcome the pangs caused by the bitter incident.

Even after bundles of struggles, fate targets Animal, once again grabbing some of his dear ones away from him forever. He misses them badly and believes that he can meet them in paradise. However, at the end he learns the nuances of life and decides to go with the flow. With countless twists and turns, life teaches him to accept himself and he decides to use his savings to free Anjali. He plans a new life with Anjali, embracing himself as he is. Acknowledging the positive side of his disability he says that he is unique because he can do things that are impossible for a man. He chooses to be a perfect animal rather than being a flawed human being. With the acceptance of his non-human identity all his longings come to an end and he sings “I am Animal fierce and free, in all the world is none like me,” (366).

The life of Animal is like a box of surprises, sometimes sweet and other times bitter. All the trials he faces, shells out enormous strength to mould him into a better personality. Without the shocking turns, life becomes prosy with no fabricating tints. Every adventurous experience that comes in the life of Animal grooms him to learn and grow, accepting all the shocks and surprises offered by universe.

### **Reference**

1. Sinha, Indra. *Animal’s people*. Pocket Books; 2008.